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LATINA COLLEGE STUDENTS OVERCOME OBSTACLES AND ADVANCE IN THEIR CAREERS THROUGH FEDERAL INTERNSHIPS

Rosa Mae Neel and Viviana Gonzalez have come a long way. Both are Latinas studying in private colleges despite their low-income families, because they received scholarships for their academic and extracurricular success.

Rosa is a junior at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. and Viviana is a senior at the University of Miami in Miami, Fla. Both are first-generation college students who have achieved without many career role models. Now they are both interning at the U.S. Minerals Management Service in Camarillo, Calif. through the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities.

“It’s nice to see that you can overcome the barriers of being a woman and being Hispanic,” said Rosa, who grew up in Lima, Peru, and moved to Miami when she was 10 years old. “I’m glad that MMS is aware of the need to bring in employees who are representative of our community.”

Rosa is majoring in journalism at NU and she hopes to highlight problems in Latin America, especially children in poverty, through investigative reporting.

“When I was living in Lima, I saw kids my age begging for food at our front door,” she said. “My goal is to make a difference in kids’ lives through journalism and volunteer work.”

During the ten-week internship, Neel will work in the public affairs division of MMS, writing and editing press releases, coordinating media and outreach events, and developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with public interest groups.

“Working for the MMS will build great experience in media relations and will give me a glimpse into how government agencies work,” said Neel, who will be a junior in the Medill School of Journalism at NU. “I’m really proud that HACU chose to give me this opportunity, and I know that I will use this knowledge to help people later.”

Neel graduated from Miami Sunset Senior High School, where she was president of the speech and debate team and the Spanish Honor Society. She received a writing award from the National Council of Teachers of English and more than 20 awards for oratory competitions. At NU, Neel has reported for The Daily Northwestern and is an active member of the Delta Gamma sorority.

Viviana will graduate from UM this year with a systems analysis major and a minor in computer information systems. She hopes to attend graduate school in Florida to study industrial engineering with a management focus.

At MMS, Viviana works to make web pages more accessible for the blind and she creates web pages for the internship program.

“Computers have always interested me,” said Viviana, who has had two internships with the federal government through HACU. “So an internship about web page design sounded like a great opportunity to develop skills and experience.”

At UM, she was a pledge educator and now the historian for Alpha Kappa Psi, UM’s business fraternity. She participated in the Kids ‘n Culture program to give underprivileged kids a look inside college. She is also a salsa teacher for the Ibis Dancers, a social club, and she teaches dance at the student wellness center.

Viviana graduated from G. Holmes Braddock Senior High School in Miami, where she was in the math, science and national honor societies. She even managed to play tennis her senior year while working 20 hours a week.

She remembers going through school without much homework help from her family, but she still says her parents were always supportive. She hopes to help improve education for minorities by speaking at schools.

“I want to show kids who are in what was my position that you can accomplish a lot,” she said. “You need to have enough determination and desire to reach and surpass your goals.”

The U.S. Department of the Interior Diversity Internship Program provides professional experience for ethnically diverse students in related fields that will enable them to make informed career choices. The program aims at merging academic studies with hands-on application in the DOI’s agencies. The internship program works with agencies such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities to connect with applicants.

HACU, which put Rosa and Viviana in contact with MMS, is a national association dedicated to promoting the development of member colleges and universities, and improving access to and the quality of post-secondary educational opportunities for Hispanic students. HACU also endeavors to meet the needs of business, industry and government through the development and sharing of resources, information and expertise.

MMS is the federal agency in the U.S. Department of the Interior that manages the nation’s oil, natural gas and other mineral resources on the outer continental shelf in federal offshore waters. The agency also collects, accounts for and disburses mineral

revenues from federal and Indian leases. These revenues totaled nearly \$10 billion in 2001 and more than \$120 billion since the agency was created in 1982. Annually, nearly \$1 billion from those revenues go into the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the acquisition and development of state and federal park and recreation lands.

“The MMS staff is very happy to welcome Rosa and Viviana, who bring with them great enthusiasm and talent,” said Dr. Lisle Reed, Pacific OCS Regional Director. “We hope their time here provides them with valuable experience about MMS and our federal government.”

-MMS POCS-

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